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Britain picks itself up again

Despite the horrific attacks, Thursday's polls will go on

The United Kingdom's relatively strong record of preventing Islamicist terror is now in shreds with what seems to be the third such attack on its soil in as many months. However, if this attack was meant to impact the timing of the polls, it has not worked as the political establishment has decided

to stay the course. This outrage is a stern reminder that no matter what a government's record on counterterrorism has been, the past is no guarantee of the future. While it can cautiously be claimed that terrorist atrocities on a 9/11 scale are today unlikely, the present man-car-knife attacks are becoming ever more common — and remain all but impossible to prevent once in motion.

The logistical simplicity of such attacks and the body counts racked up have made them popular. The present attack in London follows the increasingly common trend of ending an attack with knives or guns, and dying rather than surrendering. Most such attacks emerge from a terror cell structure that is only now beginning to be understood. What can be done to prevent such attacks is the question. It is possible to prevent the use of vehicles as explosives carriers by controlling chemical ingredients. It is next to impossible to do so if the vehicle's fender is the murder weapon. Inevitably more resources will be used to either surveil or simply place restrictions on very larger numbers of people, including their access to vehicles. The hope is these will be temporary measures and carried out only under strict guidelines and judicial review.

Sadly the Sunni Arab sense of political marginalisation that led to the rise of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in the first place is unlikely to abate any time soon if the continuing chaos in West Asia and North Africa is any indication. The expected territorial collapse of the Islamic State will see thousands of its foreign fighters heading to Europe and elsewhere with instructions to cause mayhem. Terrorism is today more random but less spectacular than it was before. Unfortunately, policing solutions will struggle to keep up while political solutions will have to wait for a degree of global coordination that simply does not exist.

A skewed and dangerous view of culture

Don't trivialise violence against women by blaming the West and Valentine's Day

Recently, addressing RSS volunteers at the end of their training, Indresh Kumar, leader and patron of the RSS-affiliated Muslim Rashtriya Manch, blamed western traditions such as Valentine's Day for attacks on women and other social ills. A PTI report quoted Mr Kumar as saying: "In India, love has been sacred and pious... but western culture commercialised love and gave birth to festival of Valentine's Day which is now responsible for problems like rape, illegitimate children and violence on women."

Mr Kumar's views could have been laughed off had their implications not been dangerous. He was addressing volunteers who should not espouse this regressive, misleading ideology when they step out to work in society. It is such misguided inferences that have made Valentine's Day the favourite target for these self-appointed custodians of Indian culture. Similar views are shared by political parties such as the Shiv Sena and MNS. Vigilante groups claiming to be custodians of 'culture' have attacked gift shops, cafes and other hangouts popular among the youth. India is a young nation and its youth should have the freedom to express their emotions — not be threatened and, worse, attacked. Another consequence of such a view is that it trivialises the issue of attacks on women. To say that such attacks are the result of 'western' culture and influences is a denial of what is happening here. Such attacks take place because of a deep-seated bias, a wrong sense of empowerment that patriarchy breeds and a lack of respect for women. It is this skewed sense of authority and entitlement that is imposed on women.

To blame social evils on outside influence obstructs constructive discussions that are long overdue on important issues such as attacks on women. Rather than instilling such wrong notions about culture and values, organisations must teach their members to respect individual freedoms and not be prejudiced.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



A disturbing violence is on the rise

Rapes, killings and disrespecting the dead were not what the people of India were known for

The disturbing incidents of violence over the past few days have shaken the country's sensitive people to the core. Out of habit, we may choose to blame the rulers and the government for this. But this will be running away from reality. To an extent, the responsibility of preventing such incidents also rests with our society.

The first macabre incident is from Pataudi in Haryana. A woman and her grieving daughter were returning from a hospital with the body of her deceased husband. On the way home, two tyres of the ambulance got punctured at the same time.

As soon as the vehicle stopped, goons emerged from the fields nearby. On gunpoint, they demanded that the mother and the daughter part with all their money and jewellery. The mother and daughter kept pleading with them to let them go, but the goons didn't relent. The police's preliminary probe revealed that the goons themselves had littered the road with iron nails to puncture the tyres of vehicles passing through that deserted stretch.

This is happening in a country where people used to stop in their tracks when they saw a funeral procession. Leave aside crossing the path of the procession, they began praying for the departed souls and their family members. I've seen a number of

friends do this in my childhood. These included Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Today, if those who rob people taking their loved ones on their final journey call themselves Indians, we should feel like getting angry with ourselves rather than take umbrage over their misdemeanours.

Similarly, a video that recently went viral on the Internet compelled me to gnash my teeth in anger. A few louts had surrounded two young women in Uttar Pradesh's Rampur district. One of them was filming them and the others were harassing the girls. Didn't they have mothers and sisters at home, the agonised girls were heard asking them. So far, we had witnessed such scenes only in Bollywood movies, but it was real and frightening. Ironically, a campaign was launched on social media saying that all the perpetrators belonged to a particular religion. Since when did criminals become religious? Did they also conduct a caste and religion postmortem of those convicted for the December 16 gang rape in Delhi?

A day before the video went viral, the news about the Jevur incident near Greater Noida was making headlines. Even that incident is heart-rending. A few people from Jevur were compelled to venture out late at night since they were tending to a lady relative who had been hospitalised. On the way, goons robbed them and dragged the women from the family into the fields and gang



Relatives mourning the person killed in the Jevur incident

VIRENDRA SINGH GOSAIN/HT

raped them. A male relative who resisted was shot dead. A similar incident had taken place in Uttar Pradesh a few months ago.

At that time, there were attempts to politicise the incident. Similar condemnable attempts are again being made. The truth is that in times when a father helplessly watches his daughter being raped, a daughter sees it happening with her mother and the son's body lying next to them, only blaming governments won't suffice. The monsters who carry out such crimes are all around us. We have to identify these mon-

sters. The more we ignore them, the more emboldened will they get.

At a time when there is talk about building a world-class highway, there is no attempt to ensure adequate security. Although ensuring law and order is the government's job, why can't those who revel in the spike in property prices after the construction of national highways come to the police's assistance? Why do they remain helpless bystanders?

It isn't that the malaise is limited to the Hindi heartland. You may recall that two years ago, people attacked a prison in Nagaland's Dimapur to kill a rape accused. In another such gruesome incident, S Swathi, a young Chennai-based technocrat, was hacked to death in a public place. Clearly, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Kamakhya to Dwarka, there is a rise in such shameful acts of violence.

If we look at it, since Independence, we have discarded the model of village security. We may want to revisit our administrative history and social values.

During the British Raj, a watchman was enough to keep all mischief at bay. Today we have home guards and watchmen apart from the police, along with the department of civil defence. But these are misused to further selfish agendas and political gains.

I would urge those shedding tears at street-side tea stalls or on social media to discard their hollow, outspoken ways and roll up their sleeves. They should realise that the victims of such unfortunate incidents are people like us.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief Hindustan

letters@hindustantimes.com

WARNING SYSTEM



An infant with microcephaly in Brazil. Women in India who have conceived since November could soon give birth to children suffering from the disease

GETTY IMAGES

Zika cases punch holes in our healthcare surveillance

The acknowledgement of the detection of three cases in Gujarat will be a burden on our weak public health system



VIBHA VARSHNEY

Mystery fevers are not new to India. It was not unusual that the government was unable to identify the cause of the disease in many of the fever cases last year. Some of them tested positive for chikungunya virus and dengue virus but many of the cases were neither. This did not raise concern as "undifferentiated fever is a seasonal event..." the director of the National Institute of Virology (NIV) said in September 2016.

But there was something new that the government should have considered. There were reports of transmission of Zika virus and many countries had reported microcephaly and other malformations. It seemed too good to be true that India wasn't one of these countries despite the presence of vector or that Indians travel extensively and could import the disease.

A press release by WHO, dated May 26, says that the disease was present in the country in November 2016. The first case to be confirmed was a woman who developed fever after delivery and tested positive. The second

case was also a pregnant woman whose blood sample was collected in a routine test between January 6 and 12.

The real concern here is that though the presence of the virus was first confirmed by NIV, Pune in January 2017, we got to know about it in May. This is no way to deal with medical emergencies. The idea of surveillance is to take immediate action which includes informing the public about the risks. A total of three cases have been confirmed, all from Gujarat, and WHO says that the disease could be circulating in India.

Though the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's website shows a set of documents, including the Action Plan of Managing Zika Virus, these are old and do not talk about the present risks. Gujarat's Health and Family Welfare Department's site also does not mention Zika. Even NIV's site also does not have anything on the current risks. Only ICMR's site has an update in May 2017.

Are we serious about tackling the disease? It would be prudent to consider the implications of this finding. Women who conceived since November 2016 could soon give birth to children suffering from microcephaly. We will just have to wait and watch from August onwards. This could be a big burden on our weak public health system.

Vibha Varshney writes on health issues for Down to Earth magazine at the Centre for Science and Environment. The views expressed are personal

pulp-it

R SUKUMAR



The country needs sanitation vigilantes

Why have we developed the habit of disrespecting public hygiene, littering and damaging property?

A country on the move needs a slogan, so may I humbly suggest one: because a man's got to go when a man's got to go. That's the perfect slogan for a country where most men think it's OK to pee anywhere. I say men because women don't. One of the earliest lessons Indian women learn is to hold on.

This is one area where I'd recommend, support, and endorse a micro-managing surveillance state. I find it strange that a government that isn't concerned about the deleterious sanitary and aesthetic effects of public urination is worried about who someone is getting along with in their bedrooms or what and how much they are eating. Fines for public urination could fatten local administrative bodies, and actually allow them to create an army of sanitary inspectors. Imagine the number of jobs that could be created.

Why stop at one kind of effusion? India is a country of spitters. Indeed, urination and excretion would seem to be more popular national pastimes than cricket and cow protection.

India is also a country of litterers and vandals (and let's not get into a not-all-Indians argument here). I am shocked at the damage the Tejas Express suffered on its first (yes, first) journey. For those who think this happens only on trains let me tell you a story. A small one. A few years ago, on an Indigo flight, I saw the smartly dressed young man seated next to me — he was reading a book by a popular Indian author on a Kindle — dig his nose and then rub his hands and the output of his explorations on the back of the seat in front of him. I yelled at him and got him to clean it up with a tissue. Oh, in addition to being public uriners, Indian men are also nose diggers and

IN ITS EARLY YEARS, SINGAPORE FACED SIMILAR PROBLEMS WITH PUBLIC SPITTING AND URINATION - AND DEALT WITH THEM SUCCESSFULLY. THE QUESTION IS, CAN THIS BE DONE TO SCALE?

croch scratchers. Do remember to append public as a prefix for these terms too if you want to use them.

Why do we do this? Sure, when it comes to toilets, India doesn't have enough, but I am not convinced that has anything to do with it. I've seen enough men peeing right next to fully functional (and reasonably clean) public conveniences. When confronted, most of them try to brazen it out. Most aren't embarrassed. The wife thinks I am mad to engage with them, but I think of it as another version of the Henry Miller Dawn Patrol.

And sure, most public toilets are badly maintained, but, again, whose fault is that? Education is definitely part of the solution. All schools need to have a module on sanitary education (sex education can come later). Then, I am told there are many government schools in small towns and villages that do not have toilets.

Everything I've listed above is a behavioural problem, not a cultural one. And behaviour can be changed. In its early years Singapore faced similar problems with public spitting and urination — and dealt with them successfully. The question is, can this be done to scale? I do not know the answer.

What I do know is that some of the people who behave badly in India don't do so elsewhere. They are far from being model travellers when they are abroad. In London escalators, for instance, almost everyone standing still on the left lane of an escalator — the one meant for those who want to keep moving — is an Indian tourist. But they definitely don't do the things they do with impunity in India — such as throwing an empty chips packet out of the window of a Range Rover Evoque.

This means that people pee and spit wherever they want to, litter freely, and damage public property — "This MPUI has been vandalised" has become India's own "Kilroy was here" — because there are no consequences.

There should be. I am all for vigilantism when it comes to this.

R Sukumar is editor, Mint
letters@hindustantimes.com

innervoice
IN TIMES OF DISTRESS,
SPIRITUALITY IS THE
ONLY SAVIOUR



Ashutosh Garg

We all come across phases in our life when things do not look fine. These include moments when we feel low, depressed and everything around looks hazy. Most circumstances are in fact, mere perceptions and they appear disturbing just because we choose to look at them in that manner.

A very simple yet effective example is the digit 'six'. If seen from one side it looks like '6', but from the other end, the same digit is read as '9'. The digit is the same, but the way

we look at it makes all the difference.

Similarly, a situation that seems to be negative from one angle may actually have immense positivism hidden inside. We only need to look deep and realise that whatever happens is for the good. This viewpoint arises out of a certain awareness. In order to develop it, one needs to practice spirituality. Spirituality acts as an anchor to the ship of the human soul that needs to stabilise in the troubled waters of life's day-to-day problems. It gives one time and insight to reflect on the daily activities and create

positive emotions. Turning to spirituality does not reduce problems, but it surely gives the strength to withstand them with a peaceful mind.

Another great benefit of spirituality is that it awakens your inner voice and helps you clearly distinguish between right and wrong. It turns your attention towards your heart. Lord Buddha said, "Who looks inside, awakens!"

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innervoice@hindustantimes.com